

PM: Don't glamorise criminals

NEWS 3 JUN 2002

■ By Annie Freeda Cruz
and Deborah Loh
news@nstp.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — News reports that glamorise criminals can lead to more crimes, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad cautioned tonight.

He said the media should not sensationalise news reports or make criminals look like "heroes".

"If we misuse the freedom of the Press by treating a criminal as a hero, this will create the impression that one can become famous by committing crimes."

He said the Western media would pay a criminal, such as a serial killer, to tell his story because "they think the public want to read it".

"Here, the media does the same by asking a criminal his opinion and by giving him a chance to make speeches," he said at the Malaysian Press Institute awards ceremony held at the Putra World Trade Centre tonight.

Dr Mahathir said the media could practise responsible reporting on crimes such as incest by warning the public against committing the offence.

He said the Press was a powerful tool in shaping public opinion, but it did not have total freedom.

"All the Press is controlled. If not by the Government, then by the journalists themselves, the editors, sub-editors, advertisers and owners."

"Yet, in Malaysia, there is more freedom than in some developed countries. After Sept 11, these countries are trying to control their media. They feel uneasy about television stations carrying reports on al-Qaeda."

He said the majority of members of the Press in Malaysia were "responsible".

"Sometimes, there are reports that support the Government, while some make us angry and we wonder why the Press raises issues that are embarrassing or that put the Government in a bad light."

"But if we really did control the Press, none of this would happen. The Government is aware that it is not perfect. We make mistakes, we accept criticism."

He said journalists should ensure that they carried both sides of a story to be fair to the parties involved.

Dr Mahathir said journalists could help Malaysia progress by being sensitive to the country's multi-racial composition.

"Like when we pray here, we cannot pray against the *kafir* (infidels) because we are a multi-racial society. But in a 100 per cent Muslim

society, it is all right to pray that way."

Dr Mahathir said the MPI should organise programmes to help journalists upgrade their professional standards in writing and reporting.

He said journalists should uphold the truth in their reports and not sensationalise stories for popularity.

Earlier, MPI chairman Datuk Mazlan Nordin said the institute

would be seeking feedback on a proposal for a National Press Council. The council will be a professional association which regulates the profession.